Conference Report

RUSI-FES British–German Dialogue

Sarah Lain

RUSI-FES British–German Dialogue

Sarah Lain

Conference Report

Royal United Services Institute
for Defence and Security Studies

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s), and do not reflect the views of RUSI or any other institution.

Published in 2015 by the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies.

ON 30 NOVEMBER 2015, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) hosted a day-long workshop aimed at bringing together leading German and British security specialists as well as members of the UK Parliament (MPs) and Bundestag to discuss key aspects of European security. The day's events covered three sessions:

- European defence, as seen from Berlin and London
- The migrant/refugee crisis
- A review of European security relations with Russia.

Each session began with introductory presentations by subject-matter experts, followed by comments from political representatives of both the UK and Germany. Group discussion then followed.

This report will summarise the major conclusions of the day's discussions and also suggest areas on which policy-makers should focus their attention. The aim is to highlight knowledge gaps and areas that warrant further research in order to inform more effective policy.

European Defence, as Seen from Berlin and London

This session highlighted some of the key challenges facing the EU and NATO in their ability to provide for the security of Europe. This was discussed within the framework of the UK's Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), National Security Strategy (NSS) and Germany's upcoming White Paper on security and defence.

A German Perspective

Workshop participants were certainly of the view that Germany's approach to defence had evolved and adapted, particularly in relation to interventions abroad. Germany's efforts in Ukraine, epitomised by its lead role in the discussions of the Normandy format, were deemed to have improved the global reputation of the strength of the country's foreign policy. In November 2015 the Bundestag approved the deployment of troops to Mali in support of the French-led peacekeeping mission. Shortly after the workshop was held, the Bundestag approved the deployment of reconnaissance jets and air-refuelling tankers, a frigate and supporting troops to assist the US-led coalition's counter-Daesh efforts in Syria. This more active approach was praised as a robust development in Germany's defence policy. As one participant said: 'a few years ago this would have been inconceivable'.

However, doubts remained about whether this has led to a more comprehensive defence and security policy in Germany. There was some criticism of previous reform efforts within the German armed forces. The Ukraine crisis revealed deficiencies in Germany's ability to make a substantial military contribution; workshop participants cited a lack of expertise and poor procurement decisions as particularly problematic. There were also criticisms of the decision-making system, given that the required involvement of the Bundestag, which must approve

military deployment due to the Bundeswehr's definition as a 'parliamentary army', can slow decision-making with regard to multilateral efforts.

UK Perspective

Discussions on the UK's defence and security policy benefited from the fact that the UK's SDSR had already been published by the time of the workshop (by contrast, the German White Paper is scheduled for the summer of 2016). The UK's SDSR was viewed relatively positively by participants. One mentioned that it projects a 3 per cent increase in the defence budget over the next four years. It also recognises the changing nature of threats and tactics, highlighting the need to develop new capabilities in the face of non-state actors such as Daesh and Russia's hybrid-warfare tactics in Ukraine.

Deterrence and defence engagement were emphasised in the SDSR. The latter is aimed at helping countries outside of Europe to increase their own defence capabilities. As a corollary to this, there is to be a 'refocus' of the aid budget to support 'fragile and broken states and regions to prevent conflict'.[1] As one participant noted, the SDSR represents a shift in UK defence policy to a more 'internationalist' approach, moving away from a focus on international matters solely through the lens of domestic concerns.

Challenges remain, however. Correcting the knock-on effects of spending decisions made as part of the last UK defence review in 2010 features in this year's SDSR. For example, the SDSR includes the purchase of nine maritime patrol aircraft, an item that was previously scrapped as part of cost-cutting measures. This is in part a recognition of perceptions that the Russian maritime threat is growing, given Russia's recent testing of European, and in particular UK, waters, which poses a potential threat to the UK's nuclear deterrent. Moreover, cost escalation continues to be an issue, even though this is something the government claims to have contained. It emerged that Trident is now set to cost £31 billion, up from the previous estimate of £25 billion. A further £10 billion has been set aside as a contingency.

European Cohesion

A key point made when discussing European defence and security more broadly is that this should not be equated with EU defence. Instead, it should be understood as a mixture of NATO policy, as well as bilateral and multilateral co-operation and agreements. The issue of a 'European Army' was discussed briefly, but many were sceptical of the idea, citing the lack of support across Europe. There was a strong perception among participants that bilateral relationships are becoming increasingly important, representing a tendency towards state-driven processes. For example, the UK's SDSR mentions Germany as an important partner.

Participants discussed the need for better capability co-ordination within European defence. One participant noted that NATO's defence spending target of 2 per cent of GDP was 'not the

---

1.   HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Defence Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, Cm 9161 (London: The Stationery Office, 2015), p. 6.

yardstick' used by Germany, which views co-operation with other nations to ensure coverage of capabilities as being more important, because of the positive impact this can have on quality. The nature of many contemporary conflicts, including civil and proxy wars, requires more than traditional and conventional military operations, as Russia's hybrid-warfare tactics in Ukraine have highlighted. There was broad agreement that integration of European countries' defence capabilities would produce a more effective approach.

The UK referendum on its membership of the EU was discussed as a factor in European security. By leaving the EU the UK could 'lose the voice it currently has on EU security policy', as one delegate said. There was also concern that there would be little consensus on what a post-EU UK would look like, should it decide to leave the Union. Many viewed this as a manifestation of a broader lack of cohesion in Europe, in part resulting from a European identity crisis. Despite the internationalist agenda of the SDSR, there were also concerns that on this particular topic the UK government talks in terms of a national agenda, which is less effective in solving security issues facing both the UK and Europe more broadly.

A point highlighted was that following the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, France invoked Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty, which obliges 'mutual aid and assistance' if a member state is a victim of armed aggression. It chose not to invoke Article 222, which defers to EU institutions and asks member states to use 'all the instruments at [their] disposal', including military resources, to respond to the terrorist threat in the territory of a member state.[2] One respondent preferred their view that the preference of Article 42.7 to Article 222 reflected the fact that France was making a statement to Europe rather than calling on EU institutions to respond to a serious security threat. The participant viewed this as a sign of a lack of faith in EU institutions to handle security issues. France thus chose 'Europe over the EU', seeking a new formula specifically to combat terrorism through greater co-operation, such as through sharing passenger information. Another handicap noted of these articles, as well as NATO's Article V, is the lack of clarity over the expected response. Instead participants saw the invocation of such articles as more of a symbolic declaration.

There was some discussion on the EU's role in defence versus that of NATO in light of these events. Some saw France's invocation of Article 42.7 as a positive step, as it highlighted the potential relevance of the EU to collective defence and signalled the development of a 'coalition of the willing' towards greater co-operation. The article was being used in a new way, speaking to a broader message that while security matters, it is not all about 'hard security' and armed forces, and that the EU has a role in terms of soft policy. Most participants agreed that this invocation of Article 42.7 symbolised a call for European solidarity that had previously appeared absent in the face of European security threats, rather than representing an explicit call for collective defence. One delegate mentioned that the 'window of opportunity for European defence has never been so good as now' and that Europe should be taking this more seriously.

---

2.   EU, Lisbon Treaty, Article 222, <http://www.lisbon-treaty.org/wcm/the-lisbon-treaty/treaty-on-the-functioning-of-the-european-union-and-comments/part-5-external-action-by-the-union/title-7-solidarity-clause/510-article-222.html>, accessed 14 December 2015.

Conclusions

- Further discussion should be had around the current status, aims and capabilities of European defence co-operation. There should be greater clarity with regards to the security mechanisms and capabilities that the EU can offer, and how they fit in with or complement those of NATO. Better co-ordination would help to prevent duplication and is crucial in identifying and filling gaps in security provision to combat or address complex issues such as terrorism
- Once the realities and capabilities of European defence are better defined, Europe should seek better capability integration. This would depend on a number of factors, such as improved European cohesion and the UK's future within the EU, but capability co-ordination between states – in particular, the larger European states, such as France, Germany and the UK – is desirable
- As a corollary to this, debate about European defence would help to address issues of European identity. There should be broader discussion about the current level of aspiration to define a European identity, and the realistic benefits and drawbacks such definition might contribute towards improved security co-ordination.

The Migration Crisis

Europe was taken by complete surprise by the scale of the recent influx of migrants and refugees, which has tested its cohesion and exposed a significant lack of consensus regarding the approach towards this highly complex problem.

It was generally agreed that one factor in the failure so far in tackling the problem is that European leaders are not looking at the problem in its entirety and, in particular, at the real root causes. For example, Syria is not the only source of refugees. Eritrea has also seen repression and conflict, which adds to the flows. Greater numbers are coming from Afghanistan. Moreover, some of those coming to Europe are economic migrants from Bangladesh or Nigeria who are seeking opportunities or who may have been displaced in third countries, such as Libya, due to conflict.

Divergent Views

Some participants said it is necessary to differentiate the drivers and incentives of refugees (fleeing conflict or repression) from those of migrants (seeking better opportunities) in order to engage effectively with the problem overall. The approach to dealing with economic migrants will be different to that in relation to refugees, and this is inevitably dictated by national capacity and interests, again highlighting challenging differences within Europe. Some countries, such as Germany, have adopted an 'open door' policy to accommodate all groups, but the UK has pursued a more limited response due to reasonable questions of security and the pressure the inflow of refugees and migrants would place on housing and public services. A good point raised during discussion at the workshop was that current refugee/migrant settlement patterns will

also dictate future patterns, as people tend to settle where they know people or have family, pointing to the need for long-term thinking as to the impact of the crisis on Europe.

Many agreed that the response to this crisis has highlighted failings in public policy, particularly on immigration, at both the multinational and national levels. One speaker echoed this when mentioning that keeping track of people once they enter any European country is difficult given the large numbers involved, which has exacerbated the challenge.

The crisis has also revealed differing national views on immigration and migration within Europe. For example, one participant said they had recently visited Bulgaria, where there was 'open hostility' towards Germany's welcoming of refugees and migrants; it was 'not Bulgaria's problem' in the view of many there. It was added that free movement, a fundamental pillar of the EU, is 'now at risk, because the Schengen zone is under such pressure'. Again, this has highlighted something of a crisis of identity within Europe itself.

In-Country Challenges

Many European countries have faced challenges in coping with the influx of people. One speaker mentioned that in Hamburg there had previously been only one reception centre dealing with refugees; this speaker said that now there are thirty dealing with 28,000 people entering the city. This highlights how much of a surprise this crisis was for Europe more broadly. As one participant mentioned, some infrastructure, such as reception centres, had been closed, presumably as they were deemed to be unnecessary. This has clearly tested the European leadership and, once again, European cohesion.

There are also domestic tensions, some of which are between the state and its citizens: for instance, there is popular will in Germany to help refugees, but the state is not fit to handle the influx in full. There are bureaucratic hurdles to dealing with the issue effectively. Moreover, there is a divergence of opinions even among German federal states – for example, Lower Saxony proposes establishing maximum limits for the number of refugees/migrants who could settle in the state. It is a multifaceted discussion, even within Germany. There was some criticism, particularly from UK delegates, of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's open-door policy, with one delegate saying that once the gates are open 'people know they have to shut at some point'.

Tackling the Root Cause

Returning to the issue of tackling the migration/refugee crisis, one speaker suggested that any response should engage with four key challenges: ensuring safe passage; finding housing for the large numbers of refugees/migrants entering Europe; addressing tensions between new arrivals and established communities; and understanding the security picture resulting from the largescale movement of people to and through Europe. Although the risk of infiltration by Daesh of those refugees/migrants coming to Europe may be overstated, such security risks are real.

Discussions further highlighted the perceived flaws of European approaches so far. First, there is an overemphasis on simply halting the flows of people, which is not a solution to the problem: tackling the problem at source is more important. Reference was made to the possibility of using naval operations to combat what is often seen as one of these root causes: the people smugglers and criminal groups that encourage and facilitate such mass movement of people. Arguably, Europe does not yet know enough about the networks of people smugglers – a hugely complex subject – to deal with this issue adequately. Moreover, such approaches tend to target middlemen facilitating travel rather than the top level of the network, which would be crucial if it is to have an impact. The use of tried and tested military responses was also criticised, with the reliance on Operation *Atalanta* as a model for combating these networks deemed to be flawed – first, because the legal basis for this operation was anti-piracy, and second, because this strategy addresses a symptom without looking at the root cause.

Conclusions

- European cohesion has once again been tested by this crisis. More should be done to understand the exact root causes of the influx of refugees and migrants to Europe. Syria is not the only issue. Even taking Syria in isolation, more work needs to be done to understand the drivers behind the flow of refugees. This will also help to inform the Vienna Process, which is another tool at Europe's disposal in trying to resolve the crisis
- More work should be done on understanding the complex criminal and people-smuggling networks facilitating the influx of refugees and migrants to Europe
- More research should be undertaken regarding the likely long-term impact of current crisis-management strategies
- The migration crisis is incredibly complex. It is a controversial issue that has exposed a diverse, and divergent, range of opinions and approaches towards EU freedom of movement and capacity to accommodate people within the EU. This has highlighted rifts within the EU itself, showing again a trend towards fragmentation and the renewed importance of national interests. It has also demonstrated institutional constraints relating to collaboration within Europe. More should be done to co-ordinate national approaches, whilst being realistic about the differences in capacity. A dedicated European coalition could be formed to deal with the crisis.

European Security Relations with Russia

Europe seems to have struggled to define its response to Russia's testing of the current security architecture in a way that does not appear purely reactive. As one speaker mentioned, there is the perception that 'Russia has a strategy, but we don't'. However, unpacking Moscow's rhetoric and posturing and distinguishing it from reality is important in defining a future European approach to Russia.

Russia's ultimate aim in its current foreign policy is to show its capability as a 'rule-setter' akin to the role it perceives the US to have played over the past decade. Russia's shift in foreign policy is linked to its own threat perception, which reflects the belief that a heightened geopolitical

competition is taking place. Moscow perceives NATO as becoming increasingly aggressive and, following the so-called 'colour revolutions' in Ukraine and Georgia, its suspicion of Western foreign policy has also increased. However, Russia should be viewed as a rational actor in many ways, and its activities are not predetermined. However, it is clearly also highly self-interested. In connection with this, Russia is now presenting itself as being less willing to compromise on global issues framed within Western terms, unless they are in line with Russian national interests. It is unclear as yet how pragmatic Russia is willing to be with regards to conflicts in third countries, such as Ukraine and Syria.

One speaker also mentioned that relations with Russia are likely to continue to be problematic, because of differences over approaches to engagement. Russia seems to be unwilling to accept any responsibility for any of its actions. Transferring blame has now become common practice. This has been highlighted most recently by Russia's initial refusal to admit that a Russian Su-24 fighter entered Turkey's airspace before being shot down by a Turkish fighter in November 2015. Moscow resorted to tactics reminiscent of its reaction to the downing of MH17 in July 2014, producing 'counter-evidence' to Turkish radar tracking maps indicating the Russian violation of Turkish airspace. Moreover, there appears to be a misunderstanding on the Russian side as to European intentions. The Russian tradition of statehood makes it difficult to conceive any competition as anything other than a zero-sum game, sometimes in the framework of competing empires.

However, there should also be a better assessment of how Europe has interacted with Russia to date. It was generally agreed in discussion that Russia has at least been consistent in its messaging to the West. It has repeatedly expressed its dissatisfaction with the West's perceived refusal to listen to Russian interests. It has also consistently crticised what it perceives to be a 'unipolar' world dominated by the US. There is, on the one hand, a need to more explicitly show that, despite sanctions and disagreements over Ukraine, the West is always willing to talk with Russia. Better communication with Russia at both the bilateral and European levels is required.

This raises questions about Europe's approach to deterrence. The UK's SDSR highlighted this as a key aim, particularly in the context of Russia increasing its presence within close proximity to European, and NATO, airspace and territorial water. This is where Europe's policy appears most reactive, in part because meeting Russian tactics like-for-like, or with 'strength' and aggression, would risk an escalation without achieving much in the broader debate. This was most recently shown when Turkey shot down Russia's Su-24 aircraft. Although this resulted in high tensions in Russia–Turkey bilateral relations and prompted an economic backlash from Russia, it arguably succeeded in genuinely deterring Russia from violating Turkey's airspace again. Instead, as one speaker said, Europe should take a 'non-hysterical but firm approach' to Russia.

The NATO Wales Summit in 2014 placed a premium on deterring a Ukraine-type scenario in the Baltics, the centre point of which is the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. Although this has provided reassurance to the Baltic States and Poland, and represents a genuine policy of deterrence, one speaker highlighted that this runs the risk of an over-concentration on one area without seeing Moscow's broader intentions in its foreign and domestic policy. Understanding

Russia's aims and objectives – namely, of undermining Western and allied effectiveness – in more detail is key to devising a more comprehensive defence against Russian aggression in other arenas.

Moreover, one speaker suggested that understanding Russia's weak points, in the way that Moscow understands those of its own adversaries, and understanding where Russia needs the West is important in identifying Europe's own leverage in any negotiating situation. For example, the performance of regime forces in Syria has been highly disappointing to Russia, given the slow progress in making military gains on the ground against rebel groups. This could be problematic in the long term for Russia. In addition, also understanding the tension points in Russia's relations with its 'allies', such as China, is useful in creating a better strategy for engagement with Russia.

The issue of propaganda and information warfare was also discussed in broad terms at the workshop. There was general agreement that it is impossible, and undesirable, to counter Russian misinformation in like-for-like terms. Instead, undermining the message by clarifying the truth and points at which facts have been manipulated is a more effective and principled approach. Moreover, highlighting Russia's own contradictions and hypocrisies should be a part of any response, without descending into petty tit-for-tat exchanges. Although the Russian media machine has been effective in domestic terms, one speaker highlighted that not all members of the Russian audience are vulnerable to it, and the cynicism of Russian jokes reflects the fact that some members of the population know things are not going as well as Russian media often portrays.

In terms of next steps, one speaker suggested that Russian–European relations can be classified in four ways: do we have a 'shared home'; some 'shared interests'; a 'divided home' (whereby there are no shared values but there is peaceful coexistence); or a 'broken home'? This speaker believed relations currently represent a divided home, but that they might be shifting towards being a broken home. It is in Europe's interests to prevent this, but this would also involve a decision by Russia to engage productively.

Conclusions

- There is a perception that Russia has a strategy for Europe, but Europe does not have one for Russia. Although there is truth in this, this is also an image that Russia wishes to project and may be exaggerated. Europe should better understand the Russian strategy, its weaknesses and Russia's own vulnerabilities in order to determine European or bilateral leverage in any negotiating situation. This would also assist particularly in defining the best approach to deterrence
- Understanding the interplay of Russia's relations with its current 'allies', such as China and Iran – the latter, most notably, in the context of Russia's entry into the conflict in Syria – is also important as a part of defining this approach. Again, the perception Russia wishes to create is one of strength, but understanding the limitations and points of differences in these alliances can help the West in its strategy for deterrence

- As two speakers suggested, scenario planning should be done at both the bilateral and European levels to better understand potential areas of engagement with Russia as well as likely outcomes of Russian behaviour. Analysis needs to be done on both the framework through which Europe would like to work with Russia and the realistic and likely consequences of this.

Sarah Lain is a Research Fellow at RUSI. Her research focuses on Russia and the former Soviet states. In particular, she focuses on China's and Russia's relations with Central Asia.